

THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

REPORT

TO THE

International Congress, Copenhagen, 1910

The appearance of the Labor Party as a force in politics at the General Election of 1906 gave an impetus to the Socialist movement in England which continued for several years, and in which the Fabian Society fully participated.

The growth of the Society is shown by the following statistics :

	1904	1907	1908	1909	1910
MEMBERSHIP - -	730	1,267	2,015	2,462	2,627
INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES, £ -	1,167	1,383	2,535	3,352	3,296
LOCAL SOCIETIES	7	10	27	39	46
MEMBERS OF LO- CAL SOCIETIES*	?	?	?	500	750

* In addition to a large number who are also members of the London Society.

Political Activities.

The Fabian Society from its foundation in 1884 adopted somewhat unusual attitude towards politics.

It was stated in our Report to the International Congress 1896, that "The Fabian Society does not claim to be the people of England or even the Socialist Party, and therefore does not seek direct political representation by putting forward Fabian candidates at elections. . . . Far from holding aloof from other bodies, it urges its members to lose no opportunity of joining them and permeating them with Fabian ideas as far as possible."

The Society still maintains this tolerant attitude in relation to its members. It requires no pledge that they shall, as individuals, support the Labor Party or Socialist candidates. It welcomes as members those whose political activities are exerted through the Labor Party and the I.L.P., through the Socialist Democratic Party and the Liberals, and even through the Conservatives and the Irish Nationalists, though it is doubtful whether many Fabians belong to the two last. Thus it happened that at the close of the 1906-9 Parliament, out of eleven Fabians who were members of Parliament, six belonged to the Labor Party and five to the Liberals, and in the present Parliament, of the eight Fabians elected, four belong to the Liberals and four sit as Labor members.*

Nevertheless the Society has in one respect made a marked alteration in its policy. It took official part in forming the Labor Party in 1900, and has always been affiliated thereto and represented on its Executive. But until 1909 it never "promoted" any candidature through that Party, or made itself as a body responsible for any candidate either for Parliament or a local body.

* Three of these four M.P.'s are members of the I.L.P. as well as the Fabian Society.

In 1908 it deliberately decided to enter into politics, and since then it has fought three elections, putting up one candidate at a bye-election in 1909 and two at the General Election of 1910. All these candidates have been run under the auspices of the Labor Party, and it is significant of the friendly relations between the Fabian Society and the I.L.P. that all these candidates were also members of that Society, and two of them were first put up by the I.L.P. and subsequently taken over by the Fabian Society. Unfortunately none of these candidates was successful. At present the Society is arranging for three candidates for the next General Election.

Fabianism outside London.

A few years before 1894, when the I.L.P. was founded, Fabian Societies had been formed in all the chief cities of Great Britain. But the I.L.P. provided an organization and a political policy better suited to the provincial Socialist, and our local organization was quickly absorbed by that body. Except in Liverpool and one or two universities, organized Fabianism in the provinces scarcely existed, and the tiny societies which occasionally sprung up disappeared after a year or two of feeble life. In the last year or two a substantial change has taken place.

In the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge the membership has grown from nothing or less than a dozen to almost a hundred in each case, and similar societies have been established in nearly all the numerous newer universities; whilst the increasing interest of the middle classes in the Socialist movement is indicated by the fact that in nearly every large city a sufficient number of people in sympathy with our methods have been found to form local Fabian Societies for the study and propaganda of the principles of Socialism.

Poor Law Reform.

For the past year much of the energy of the Society has been devoted to popularizing the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law.

Of the four Royal Commissioners who signed this report two, Mrs. Sidney Webb and George Lansbury, are members of our Society, and it is an open secret that the former of these was, with her husband, mainly responsible for the preparation of that epoch-making document.

The Minority Report is an elaborate scheme for the abolition of destitution, and incidentally provides a practicable method of solving the problem of unemployment, as it presents itself in England. Its principles have been approved by the Labor Party, the Co-operative Movement, as it presents itself in the Union Congress and its Parliamentary Committee, the I.L.P., the Trade Union members was also amongst the signatories.

The direct agitation for the adoption of this method of reform has been carried on by a society constituted for that purpose, "The National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution," of which Mrs. Sidney Webb is honorary secretary and to which many of our members belong. But the Fabian Society as a body has devoted much of its energy to popularizing its principles by lectures and addresses throughout the country.

It is a remarkable indication of the progress made by the fundamental ideas of Socialism in England that this far-reaching scheme for collective reorganization of casual labor, unemployment and pauperism, when introduced as a private member's Bill into the House of Commons in April last was cordially welcomed by the leader of the Conservatives, Mr. Arthur Balfour, and scarcely less cordially by the Liberal Premier. Indeed, it may be said that its rival, the Majority Report, is already dead and buried.

Educational Work.

The Society devotes most of its energy to the education of itself, its own members, the Socialist Party, and the general public, in the principles of Socialism and good government.

It holds lectures twice a month, at which some new aspect of Socialism, or the application of Socialism to some particular point of our environment, is considered. The best of these lectures, and papers otherwise prepared, sometimes by specially selected committees, are published as "Fabian Tracts," a series which has now reached No. 150, and which has a reputation beyond our own country for accuracy and moderation of statement, combined with full recognition of revolutionary principles.

For the purposes of study its members are associated in Groups, which discuss amongst themselves special subjects, such as Education, Local Government, Biology, and the Legal and Economic Position of Women, all in relation to the Socialist State for which the Society is working.

The Society possesses a library of 5,000 or 6,000 books dealing with history, economics, social conditions, and Socialism, which is available for its members and is also used as a circulating library. Every year nearly 200 boxes of books are lent for a small sum to Socialist Societies, Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, and to any other body, Socialist, Labor, Liberal, educational or philanthropic, which applies for them.

Lastly, the Society arranges a large number of lectures, some given free of charge by its members, chiefly to other organizations, and some in educational courses of four lectures each on some set subject, which are given by professional lecturers engaged at the expense of the Society, and sent over the country wherever a local Fabian Society, an I.L.P. branch, or any other local organization will undertake to find a hall and arrange for an audience.

The Fabian Society believes that ignorance is the chief enemy to the progress of Socialism, and that full and correct knowledge of social history and industrial conditions must, sooner or later, lead to the triumph of Socialism.

On behalf of the Executive Committee
of the Fabian Society,

FABIAN OFFICE,
3 CLEMENT'S INN, STRAND,
LONDON, W.C.—*June 1910.*

EDW. R. PEASE,
Secretary.

BASIS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

THE FABIAN SOCIETY consists of Socialists.

It therefore aims at the re-organization of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only can the community for acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of Rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantages of superior soils and sites.

The Society, further, works for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially. For, owing to the monopoly of the means of production in the past, industrial inventions and the transformation of surplus income into Capital have mainly enriched the proprietary class, the worker being now dependent on that class for leave to earn a living.

If these measures be carried out, without compensation (though not without such relief to expropriated individuals as may seem fit to the community) Rent and Interest will be added to the reward of labor, the idle class now living on the labor of others will necessarily disappear, and practical equality of opportunity will be maintained by the spontaneous action of economic forces with much less interference with personal liberty than the present system entails.

For the attainment of these ends the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereon, including the establishment of equal citizenship for men and women. It seeks to achieve these ends by the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and Society in its economic, ethical and political aspects.